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Cornell Names New Wine Grape 'Abundance'

by Linda McCandless

BUFFALO, NY: The newest grape from Cornell University's internationally acclaimed fruit breeding program has been named 'Abundance'. Grape breeder Bruce Reisch named and released the red wine grape during the Viticulture 2003 Conference in Buffalo, NY, on February 20.

"'Abundance' is vigorous, productive, winter hardy, and makes a very enjoyable wine," said Reisch.

Grape growers and wine makers helped select a name for the new grape, and also pushed Cornell to officially name and release the new variety, because it has proven to be such a reliable producer in the Finger Lakes since industry testing began in the 1970s.

"This grape is the product of opportunity and circumstance," said Reisch. Normally it takes 15 to 25 years to test and release a new grape variety. With 'Abundance', it took many years for growers and researchers to discover that it remained productive in older vineyards, while other red wine varieties succumbed to disease. "In the intervening years, wine makers also discovered how to make better wines with it," said Reisch. "Because sales of red wine have soared in recent years due to reputed health benefits, wine makers need a good red wine grape to meet increased demand. 'Abundance' can help them do that."



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The new 'Abundance' grape, named for its productivity, and released by Cornell at the Viticulture 2003 conference on Feb. 20, in Buffalo, NY, makes a good red wine, and is disease resistant and very winter hardy.

"This was a grape the industry strongly encouraged us to release," said Station director James E. Hunter. "It is a good example of the continuing relevance of the fruit breeding programs at the Experiment Station for New York State agriculture."

In its 125-year history, the Station has developed and released 243 different varieties of fruit for commercial and home garden use. Of those, 52 have been grapes. 'Abundance' is the sixth wine grape to be released.

'Abundance' is already under cultivation in Finger Lakes vineyards and used commercially for wine, particularly in red wine blends.

" 'Abundance' makes dark red wines with a classical hybrid aroma," said Station enologist Thomas Henick-Kling, who helped in the grape's development. "'Abundance' has much improved viticulture and wine making characteristics over older red hybrid varieties. It makes a good quality wine with attractive cherry flavors."

"We find 'Abundance' has good color and moderate acidity," said Steve diFrancesco, the wine maker at Glenora Wine Cellars. "'Abundance' is generally the first wine to complete malolactic fermentation, which we then use to inoculate our other red hybrids." Glenora has been using 'Abundance' in its Classic and Bobsled reds for over eight years.

Wines made with 'Abundance' from Wagner, Glenora, Pleasant Valley and Canandaigua Wine Company were tasted during the name and release event. So were wines from three other wine grapes developed at the Experiment Station- 'Cayuga White', 'Melody', and "Traminette"- from Arbor Hill, Swedish Hill, Fulkerson, and Goose Watch wineries.

"Wine is a food to be enjoyed with other foods," said Jim Trezise, president of the New York Wine & Grape Foundation. "A variety like 'Abundance' is the type of grape to make that happen because it is reliable producer in the vineyard which makes a simple, friendly and affordable wine to accompany other good foods on the table. The increasing popularity of red wines due to widely reported health benefits from moderate consumption just adds to its importance."

'Abundance', formerly tested as GR 7 and NY 34791, was selected from a cross of 'Buffalo' x 'Baco noir', made in 1947, and tested extensively in the Experiment Station grape breeding program under Richard Wellington, John Einset, Willard Robinson, and Robert Pool.



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Grape breeder Bruce Reisch, shown here with a selection of table and wine grapes from Cornell's breeding program, calls the new 'Abundance' grape "a working man's red."



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'Abundance' is already under commercial production in the Finger Lakes. Steve diFrancesco, winemaker at Glenora Wine Cellars, in Dundee, NY, uses it in Glenora's Bobsled and Classic reds.

Grower-advisor Seaton "Zeke" Mendall helped popularize the grape among growers. The Experiment Station plans to release three more wine grapes in 2006, a white Muscat and two other red varieties.

'Abundance' is available for public use. For a license to propagate and distribute 'Abundance', commercial nurseries should contact the Cornell Research Foundation at 607-257-1081. Vines are available to growers and homeowners through licensed nurseries.

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